

# Ascending the Rungs of the Youth Adult Equity Ladder

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# Introduction

Thank you for completing the Youth Adult Equity Ladder Assessment! This brief guide provides suggestions on ways your organization may move up the ladder and ascend to a higher rung. This is an evolving document, which will be updated as organizations complete their assessment and provide evidence for youth adult equity within their organizations.

As a reminder, youth adult equity is defined as the practice in which youth and adults share full responsibility, commitment, and agency. It is grounded in the recognition that we are all experts on our own lived experiences, and that the best social change work occurs where everyone's experiences are valued and included.

Specifically, youth adult equity encompasses four broad categories:

1. Support/Development: Both youth and adults are receiving appropriate development, including how to engage with youth, how to engage with adults, and general development on how to do work.
2. Decision-making power: Both youth and adults make decisions together about all activities that center the lived experience of youth.
3. Lived experience: All strategies and activities center the lived experience of youth.
4. Ownership and outcome: Both youth and adults have a clear role in implementation and youth and adults have equitable ownership of outcomes.

Suggestions for each category are outlined below, followed by suggestions by sector.

# Support/Development

**Youth Skill-Building Workshops:** Host workshops and training sessions where youth can acquire and develop essential life skills, leadership skills, and advocacy skills.

**Youth Feedback Loops:** Establish regular feedback mechanisms where youth can express their needs and preferences regarding support and development, allowing the organization to tailor its offerings accordingly.

**Peer Support Networks:** Create peer support networks among youth members, fostering a culture of support and camaraderie.

**Resource Access:** Ensure that youth have access to necessary resources for their personal and professional development, including educational resources, mentorship opportunities, and career guidance.

*EXAMPLE: Youth Mentorship Programs: Initiate mentorship programs where experienced youth members guide newer participants, ensuring their growth and development. This fosters a supportive environment for skill-building and personal growth.*

*LOCAL CONTEXT: [The Black and Latino/a Ecosystem and Support Transition \(BLEST\) Hub](#) strives to create a strong collegial and cooperative environment, as well as to build a sense of belonging for diverse youth engaged with it. They have built in check-ins (formal and anonymous) so that spaces are created feedback for adults and those leading the work, systematized processes for collecting and reflecting on how they are doing with this goal, and also frequently bring in emotional well-being formally and informally into conversations to try to further open this space.*

*LOCAL CONTEXT: Students create their demands for the MPS budget and [LIT](#) helps them prepare for the full budget process by providing them key dates, skills trainings, and connections to the board. LIT also provides monthly citywide trainings for all students, and paid weekly trainings for hired fellows.*

# Decision-Making Power

**Shared Leadership:** Transition to a shared leadership model where youth and adults jointly hold leadership roles, ensuring that decisions are made collaboratively.

**Co-Design of Programs:** Involve youth in the co-design of programs and initiatives, allowing them to shape the direction and objectives.

**Youth-Adult Partnership Agreements:** Develop formal partnership agreements that outline the shared decision-making processes and responsibilities for both youth and adults.

**Training for Inclusive Decision-Making:** Offer training and workshops on inclusive decision-making to equip both youth and adults with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate effectively.

*EXAMPLE: Youth Advisory Councils: Establish youth advisory councils with real decision-making authority, allowing young individuals to directly influence and shape policies, programs, and initiatives.*

*LOCAL CONTEXT: Milwaukee Succeeds is developing an [Autonomous Youth Council](#), where young people are trained and positioned within decision-making bodies.*

*LOCAL CONTEXT: [The Milwaukee Community Schools Partnership](#) employs Youth Councils at each of their schools, and these Councils develop strategies and help set school priorities.*

# Lived Experience

**Youth Storytelling Platforms:** Create platforms for youth to share their stories, whether through blogs, video series, or other media, ensuring their experiences are visible and respected.

**Storytelling Workshops:** Host storytelling workshops to help youth articulate and communicate their experiences and perspectives effectively.

**Storytelling as Evaluation:** Incorporate youth stories and experiences as a core component of program evaluation and decision-making processes.

**Media Advocacy Training:** Provide media advocacy training to youth, empowering them to use their voices to influence change and raise awareness of their experiences.

*EXAMPLE: Storytelling Initiatives: Encourage youth to share their stories and experiences to inform decision-making processes, ensuring that the real experiences and perspectives of young individuals are recognized and valued.*

*LOCAL CONTEXT: Milwaukee Succeeds captured lived experiences of young people in the [Design Your Future Fellowships](#) and [community listening sessions](#). Results from both have led to the [Autonomous Youth Council](#).*

## Ownership of Outcomes

**Co-Design of Metrics:** Collaborate with youth to co-design performance metrics and evaluation criteria, ensuring that they have a say in what success looks like.

**Youth-Led Initiatives:** Support and fund youth-led initiatives where young individuals are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating projects.

**Accountability Structures:** Establish accountability structures that hold both youth and adults responsible for achieving agreed-upon outcomes, reinforcing a sense of shared ownership.

**Recognition and Celebrations:** Celebrate the achievements and contributions of youth members, ensuring they receive due recognition for their role in outcomes.

**EXAMPLE: Co-Creation of Goals:** *Collaborate with youth to co-create organizational goals and objectives, so they feel a sense of ownership in driving the outcomes and impact of the organization.*

**LOCAL CONTEXT:** *[The Black and Latino/a Ecosystem and Support Transition \(BLEST\) Hub's](#) youth consultant/internship program is decided by adults as part of the planning process, but then the youth themselves determine the shape the sessions will take and what sorts of professional development they are offered. As an initiative, the BLEST Hub also prioritizes student growth and development, which includes having them lead activities, be deeply involved in report writing and dissemination, and join adults as experts in presentations and other public settings.*

# Philanthropy

**Youth Grant-Making Committee:** Establish a youth grant-making committee where young individuals have the power to review grant proposals, make funding recommendations, and actively participate in philanthropic decision-making.

**Youth-Adult Board Partnership:** Collaborate with a youth advisory board where young individuals sit side-by-side with adult board members, collectively determining grant allocations and organizational strategies.

**Youth Storytelling Grants:** Create a grant program that supports young individuals in telling their stories through art, media, or community engagement projects, with the outcomes shared across the organization's communications channels.

**Youth-Designed Impact Metrics:** Work with youth to develop and implement impact metrics that matter to them, allowing them to play a central role in measuring the philanthropic organization's success in achieving its mission.

# Direct Service

**Youth-Led Workshops:** Empower young individuals to lead workshops or training sessions for their peers, sharing their knowledge and expertise in areas they are passionate about, and actively contributing to their peer's personal and professional growth.

**Decision-Making Power:**

**Youth Program Design Teams:** Form teams of youth who actively participate in the design and planning of programs and services, offering insights on content, activities, and overall program structure.

**Youth Storytelling Showcase:** Organize events or showcases where youth can share their experiences through storytelling, art, or performances, allowing them to express their lived experiences and perspectives.

**Youth Advisory Committees:** Establish youth advisory committees that collaborate with adults to set goals, evaluate outcomes, and make decisions about the organization's services and their impact on the community.

# Schools/School Districts

**Student-Led Professional Development:** Enable students to lead professional development sessions for teachers and staff on topics that matter to them, such as diversity, inclusion, or mental health awareness.

Decision-Making Power:

**Student Council with Decision-Making Authority:** Transform the student council into a body with genuine decision-making power over certain school policies or activities, allowing them to actively shape the school's environment.

Lived Experience:

**Student-Led Cultural Awareness Events:** Have students take the lead in organizing cultural awareness events, where they can share their experiences and perspectives with the school community, fostering understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Ownership of Outcomes:

**Student-Led School Improvement Projects:** Support student-led projects aimed at improving various aspects of the school, from sustainability initiatives to academic support programs, where students have a significant say in planning, implementation, and assessment.

## Post-secondary/Higher Education

**Student-Run Workshops:** Encourage students to develop and facilitate workshops for their peers, focusing on academic skills, personal development, or topics of interest, providing them with the opportunity to actively contribute to fellow students' growth.

Decision-Making Power:

**Student Senate with Governance Role:** Elevate the student senate to a governance body that collaboratively participates in institutional decision-making, including budget allocation, academic policies, and campus life.

Lived Experience:

**Student-Led Campus Publications:** Support and fund student-led publications or platforms where students can express their experiences, share research, or contribute to the campus dialogue, ensuring that their voices are acknowledged and valued.

Ownership of Outcomes:

**Student-Led Research Projects:** Facilitate student-led research projects where students have ownership over the research questions, methodology, report writing, and dissemination, allowing them to make meaningful contributions to the institution's academic community. Students should be supported in sharing their research at conferences and presentations, including leading these opportunities.

# Business

**Youth Internship and Mentorship Programs:** Create internship opportunities for young individuals within the organization, coupled with mentorship programs that pair them with experienced professionals, ensuring they receive support and professional development.

**Decision-Making Power:**

**Youth Advisory Board for Product Development:** Establish a youth advisory board that actively participates in product or service development discussions, contributing insights, feedback, and ideas that influence business decisions.

**Lived Experience:**

**Youth-Driven Marketing Campaigns:** Involve young individuals in designing and implementing marketing campaigns, ensuring that their perspectives and lived experiences are authentically reflected in the organization's messaging.

**Ownership of Outcomes:**

**Youth-Initiated Community Projects:** Encourage and support youth-initiated community projects funded by the business, where young individuals take charge of planning, execution, and assessment, demonstrating their ownership over the outcomes of the initiatives.